

Exhibit No. 3Date 3-9-07Bill No. HB 117

Testimony: Senate Public Health, Welfare and Safety Committee  
Regarding: HB 117 Newborn hearing screening  
From: Steve Gettel, Superintendent  
Date: March 9, 2007

Chairman Wienberg and members of the committee, for the record my name is Steve Gettel and I am the Superintendent of the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind. The Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind strongly supports the passage of House Bill 117, an act requiring newborn hearing screenings and education.

The Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind has statutory responsibility to provide early educational intervention services to families of infants and toddlers who have a hearing loss. Through the school's outreach consultants, contracted family advisors and in collaboration with community based Part C family support specialists, MSDB provides information on the impact of deafness on communication and language acquisition and amplification systems, communication assessments, communication models including sign language instruction, and support for transition to school based services. Currently MSDB is providing early intervention services to 27 families across the state. For these families this is the best chance for ensuring that their deaf or hard-of-hearing babies will develop communication systems that allow them to acquire essential reading readiness skills so that they can be as successful in school as their hearing peers.

But for early intervention to be a success all babies with a hearing loss must be identified as early as possible. This is why it is critical that all infants are screened for hearing loss before they leave the hospital or within the first month after birth. For those babies who have failed the hearing screening it is also critical that they receive a conclusive diagnosis before 3 months of age. This will ensure that those infants with a hearing loss will be referred for intervention services before 6 months of age and that family advisors will be in the homes working with their parents to help them give their babies the best possible foundation for an appropriate education.

With the screening tools, Hi\*Track (Hearing Information and Tracking) referral system, MSDB outreach program, and Part C services already in place, failure to detect and identify even one baby with a hearing loss is unacceptable. For the young parents of every baby born with a hearing loss Montana, I urge you to recommend passage of HB 117.